

Weather



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A maximum-security inmate at the men's prison of the ACI rakes the grass between the vegetable and herb beds in the garden that he and other inmates have been growing since spring.

Lifers learn to grow

A crew of inmates, most of whom have killed, tend a garden behind razor-wire-topped fences

By **JOHN HILL**
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

CRANSTON — Last Tuesday was a sunny day in the garden. Strawberry plants huddled in tightly packed dark green rows, while against the north wall, yellow and red zinnias were in full bloom. Edible nasturtium flowers rimmed the herb section and canna plants — a favorite of four hummingbirds this summer — stood tall in a corner with their green and red-tinged leaves.

It's a garden that has produced flowers, fruits, vegetables and herbs. It is carefully tended by a crew of 10 men, most of whom have killed someone.

The approximately 100-by-50-foot garden lies off the main exercise yard at the maximum security men's prison of the Adult Correctional Institutions, surrounded on three sides by concrete and stone walls and separated from the yard by two high fences, all topped with glistening loops of razor wire.

It's the product of a volunteer effort by three women who teach the inmates



An inmate shows off a bunch of carrots he picked in the garden.

"They are going to live and die in prison."

Roberta Richman, the Department of Corrections' assistant director for rehabilitative services

gardening skills, with help from Martha Paone, the Catholic chaplain at the prison, and space and support from the Corrections Department.

Terry Meyer, a master gardener at the University of Rhode Island and one of the teachers along with Vera Bowen and Kate Lacouture, said when they proposed the idea, it was for inmates in the women's prison.

"They told us it had to be men's," she recalled. "Then they told us it had to be maximum. And then they told us it would be lifers."

At first, Meyer said the women were leery of going into the men's unit to work with inmates under life sentences, but she credited Paone with convincing them they would not only be safe, but

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